ASBESTOS

Environmental Health Services Division

Frequently Asked Questions

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a **naturally occurring mineral** that was commonly used in all kinds of infrastructures to prevent fires until the 1970's. It is still used in new buildings in other countries, and can be found in insulation, paint, wall board, floor tiles, paints, and numerous building materials. It is safe to use as long as it is not in powder form and does not become airborne.

- If in powder form, it should be cleaned up by wetting the materials to keep the materials from forming an airborne dust.
  - The primary concern is to keep asbestos from entering the lungs where it causes permanent damage to the lungs.

There are three (3) main types of asbestos fibers:

Amosite (Brown Asbestos)

- Straight, brittle fibers that are light gray to pale brown (most commonly used in thermal system insulation).

Chrysotile (White Asbestos)

- Fine, silky, flexible white fibers (the most commonly used asbestos in the United States and Canada). Current evidence suggests that Chrysotile may be less hazardous than Amosite or Crocidolite.

Crocidolite (Blue Asbestos)

- Straight blue fibers. It is **Extremely Dangerous**.

What are the health risks associated with exposure to asbestos?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers there is no known safe level of asbestos exposure. Asbestos is not considered a health risk in most situations. Asbestos is a health risk when the asbestos fibers can become airborne or can float in the air like dust.

- Therefore any potential exposure to asbestos focuses on protecting the lungs from breathing in asbestos particles.

What are the diseases caused by asbestos exposure?

Once inhaled, the small, inert asbestos fibers can easily penetrate the body's defenses. They are deposited and retained in the airways and tissues of the lungs.

- In the alveoli, the location of gas exchange, asbestos causes the development of scar tissue.
  - This thickening of the alveoli wall reduces the amount of oxygen available to the body.
  - Symptoms from exposures take 20+ years to cause health problems. Once the lungs are damaged they will not heal. If you have been exposed to asbestos dust that has led to a shortness of breath see a physician.

Asbestos causes cancer. This is known from studies of actual groups of asbestos workers, not inferred from animal studies. The time it takes to develop lung cancer is often fifteen years or longer. The time frame for developing asbestosis and mesothelioma is even longer.

- Many studies have shown the combination of smoking and asbestos exposure to have a negative synergistic affect.
  - Cigarette smokers exposed to asbestos, on the average are ten times more likely to develop lung cancer than non-smokers.

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Because asbestos fibers remain in the body, each exposure increases the likelihood of developing one or more of the following diseases.

Asbestosis

- A chronic lung ailment caused by the build-up of scar tissue inside the lungs. Asbestosis can cause shortness of breath, permanent lung damage, and increase the risk of lung infections.

Mesothelioma

- Asbestos caused cancer of the chest cavity lining or abdominal cavity.

Other Cancers

- Cancer of the lung, esophagus, stomach, colon or pancreas.

Who do I contact if I think I might have asbestos in my home?

Davis County does not test for asbestos; however, a health department asbestos Inspector can look at a sample of building material and give an opinion of whether the material looks like it contains asbestos fibers. The following link lists certified companies available in Utah to test materials for asbestos. http://www.airquality.utah.gov/HAPs/ASBESTOS/index.htm

Can I remove asbestos materials without hiring a contractor?

The State of Utah Department of Environmental Quality, Division of Air Quality maintains a web site at: http://www.airquality.utah.gov/Compliance/index.htm. Go to this site and highlight the asbestos guide. This will give you instructions on handling asbestos in the State of Utah.

What other resources are available?

Entity	Resource or Reference
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry	Asbestos http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts61.pdf
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	Asbestos http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/asbestos/
Environmental Protection Agency	Asbestos http://www2.epa.gov/asbestos